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THE LETTERS OF HARRIET AND LEON LEWIS TO ROBERT BONNER

By Arlene Moore

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THE LETTERS OF HARRIET AND LEON LEWIS TO ROBERT BONNER

By Arlene Moore

BACKGROUND: I first read the Lewis letters while researching the Brame/Clay project a number of years ago. I had the letters microfilmed and later made paper copies just in case I got the urge to "do something with them." Unfortunately, the urge struck me after I had sent my abstract to Randy Cox. I use the word unfortunately because a second look at the letters indicated that they had been more jointly authored than I had realized. Letters tended to be signed with both Leon and Harriet's name. Handwriting comparisons helped to some degree, but in the early years it was almost impossible to tell which one wrote a specific letter. Internal comments occasionally helped. For instance, both Leon and Harriet would refer to each other as the MASCULINE MEMBER or the FEMININE MEMBER. Naturally, this designation within a letter made it obvious as to which one was writing at that time. In all, there are approximately 123 letters in this collection, with about 22 definitely identified as being written by Harriet Lewis. Because of this problem in identification, this paper will be somewhat broader than I had at first intended.

I should note that the letter of permission from the New York Public Library to quote from these sources indicated the following citation, "Quotations from the correspondence of Harriet Lewis to Robert Bonner." For those who might be interested in the Bonner Collection, I cite the following information, The Robert Bonner Collection, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

With that acknowledgement, I want to spend a moment or so reviewing what we know of Robert Bonner in the context of author/publisher relations. Mary Noel's dissertation, *THE HEYDAY OF THE POPULAR STORY WEEKLY*, gives a sweeping view of publishing history for the story newspapers and in it, she points out that Bonner set out to publish the "most popular periodical of the age." (128) To do this, he paid astronomical sums for stories, poetry, and editorial columns. Mrs. Sarah Willis Eldridge, alias Fanny Fern, received \$100 for each of her columns. To secure the work of Edward Everett, the former President of Harvard University, Bonner offered to donate \$10,000 to the fund for the restoration of Mount Vernon, a cause that Everett was greatly involved in. This amount paid for 52 weekly articles, which Everett later offered to extend. (155) From 1873 onward, Mrs. Southworth received \$150 a week for all rights to her stories. This was not the total sum she earned from Bonner. Instead of regular increases in salary, he periodically paid her large bonuses when she seemed to need them the most. (182)

Bonner went a further step, however, in treating his writers with a warm personal concern. In fact, Noel comments that, "His best authors are his best friends." (186) Writers who became ill, were assured of having their salary continued until they could start to write again. (184) Others like Mr. Geoffrey Saxe might receive a check in advance to tide them over. (191)

While Bonner paid huge amounts to his writers, he remained a consummate business man. He routinely signed his writers to exclusive contracts and when possible got the copyright assigned to him as well. (337)

It is within this context that we should view the Lewis's letters. Noel briefly mentions them in several contexts. Both Harriet and Leon were signed to write exclusively for Bonner in 1869. They were each to receive \$150 a week for one serial installment apiece. (158) And, during the next eight years the Lewises managed to become indebted to Bonner for \$33,000. (182)

What little information that is known about Harriet Lewis was published in Johannsen's *HOUSE OF BEADLE AND ADAMS* under the entry for her husband. She was born in Penn Yan, New York, in 1841. Leon Lewis (Julius Warren) had noticed an article written by her in a Sunday School magazine and he began corresponding with her. They eventually met and married in 1856. She was 15, he 23. From the earliest days of their marriage, both continued to write although there is no positive identification for some of these works. During the 1860s both wrote stories that appeared in the *New York Weekly* under various pseudonyms. The most well known were the names Illion Constellano and Mrs. Grace D. Harrington. While both wrote stories independently of each other, it was a well known fact that Harriet collaborated with Leon on many of his stories, and in fact, wrote a number of them herself. Leon had published in the *Ledger* beginning in 1862, went to the *New York Weekly* for a few years and eventually back to the *Ledger*.

Johannsen notes, "From 1868 to 1878, hardly an issue of the *New York Ledger* appeared which did not have stories by both Mr. and Mrs. Lewis," concluding with, "they were extremely prosperous." In October, 1874, Leon wrote to Bonner and stated that he was worth \$150,000 in property and carried \$59,000 in insurance. (letter in Johannsen collection) They lived in a "grand style" in a beautiful home. The stable alone cost \$15,000 and was a show place of Penn Yan.

Looking at the letters themselves, certain recurring comments become evident. For instance, both Leon and Harriet tended to favor flowery superlatives. Harriet wrote to Bonner on June 23, 1870, about her latest story, *THE GIRL HERMIT*, "To this point the interest of the tale has been deepening from the beginning, and it will continue to deepen from this point to the end, making it *THE GREATEST STORY OF THE 19TH CENTURY*. This would be egotistical, of course, if said to anybody but you, but you will understand us."

Frequently comments were made about various problems that had arisen in carrying out a story. Leon noted, "have had to adjourn the Mormon tale again because of the inherent difficulties of the subject." (8/10/70) However, the next week, he wrote, "We have sent only 6 installments this week, but we mean to do better. We have waited until the ripe hour, the Mormon story develops splendidly. It will make a vast sensation." (8/27/70) Later we find them sending #3 of the *MORMON ELDER*, noting that they are paid for, being offsets of the 3rd and 4th of the 5 installments lately returned to them by express." (9/20/70)

Many of their letters were repetitious notes. For instance, enclosed are number 2 and 3 of their most recent story followed by an equally brief request for payment. In turn, one finds numerous signed receipts by Bonner indicating that the Lewises had been paid.

Bonner was known for suggesting plots to his authors and in one instance, Leon followed through. "You will see by the first chapter that I have made use of the idea of which you were speaking to me. The case of the man in Elmira who, in consequence of a blow to his head had lost his memory." Leon continued, "I have the pleasure of thinking, however, that this opening will speak for itself. Nothing I have heretofore written can bear comparison with it. Yet, it is only an exhibit of what all my

installments are to be hereafter." (3/27/73)

Frequently Leon offered suggestions to Bonner about the running of their stories. "I particularly want LORD DARKWOOD'S CRIME to follow one of mine now running in the *Ledger*." (10/15/72) Or, "please instruct your foreman to print in six installments without reference to present division of same (PRAIRIE INN) and thus we would get it out before the new year."

In January, 1873, Bonner offers the Lewises \$10,000 for their horse, Telegraph. In this area, Bonner and the Lewises were very close. Bonner had been noted for his trotting horses and early in the 1870s Leon obtained the most outstanding trotter in the country. In spite of his offer, they refused to sell with the following explanation, "We have already accumulated around us all the great essentials of comfortable and commanding existence and doubt if the value of the horse in any other form could be made to give us so much enjoyment and substance." (1/17/73)

While nothing in the letters specifically mentions other activities relating to horses, the eventual debt owed by Leon Lewis suggests that they could have been a factor. Certainly building a stable for \$15,000 makes one wonder, especially when Leon reminds Bonner their present indebtedness stemmed from the fact that Bonner had offered to make a loan for that purpose. "We would never have contracted for the work to be done if there had been any question of the money not being available."

A slightly more humorous comment appeared when they said, "In our hurry the other day, we committed a needless murder in the first installment of the FROZEN FLEET, but we will get the murder straight in the proofs." (3/29/73)

Sometime in 1871-72, the Lewises traveled to London and while there were entertained by Mr. Johnson of the *London Journal*. This was a visit that would have rather stormy repercussions for them and led to some heated arguments between them and Bodner. In a letter dated 4/9/73, the Lewises defended themselves in the following letter.

"We hasten to return by first mail the London letter and to reply to the question with which you accompany it.

"You refused us the proofs four years ago, saying (in substance) to Mrs. Lewis that if we wish to have proofs, we would be likely to give undue prominence to the thought as to how the stories would suit over there etc. (Which by the way, was a mistaken estimate of her character.)

"We or you or all of us have consequently had some \$1500 or \$2000 less income during the period than we might have had. Mr. Johnson of the *London Journal* and others have repeatedly written to us to this effect but we have never replied to more than one in ten and then only to say you having refused us proofs that they were not at our disposal, etc... True, he reprinted the stories without authority and without paying for them... But he did acknowledge Mrs. Lewis as the author and called her a "celebrated American Authoress." During our stay in London, Johnson called upon us at Morley's and offered us every courtesy,... upon the last day of our stay he pressed upon Mrs. Lewis a roll of Bank of England notes as an acknowledgement of the good he had derived from the stories...at which time he renewed his offers for proofs, and also for stories written expressly for him."

The letter goes on to mention a Mr. Fiske who came to see Bonner to negotiate for stories written by the Lewises. They conclude with, "After all you have been to us and we to you, after all we know of your heart and brain, we will require your written declaration of preference in favor of Mr. Fiske before we will believe it!"

Without knowing the contents of Bonner's letter, it is difficult to draw precise conclusions. However, there seems to be an implication that

the Lewises were trying to circumvent their contract with Bonner. Certainly the fact that they accepted money from Mr. Johnson could raise the question in Bonner's mind.

During this same time, the Lewises began to have financial difficulties. Exactly what kind were not revealed in the letters. Harriet tended to be ill or flat on her back or suffering from unmentioned aches and pains. Their production fell off and in some of the letters during 1873 and 1874 one finds frequent mention of trying to do better. In July of 1874, Leon mentions being ill and flat on his back, "but in the meantime, I shall be glad to have your current check of \$300 for the two enclosed at \$150 each."

By October, 1874, the Lewises had made some sort of adjustment with Bonner for they indicate that they would arrive in New York in pursuance of his kind invitation. "In the meantime, we shall resume business with you upon the old basis. We have a double happiness, one of present work, and one of future reception for which we hastily thank you."

During this same year Harriet became increasingly ill with periods of discomfort that doctors could not diagnose. In early January, 1875, they wrote to Dr. Moore of Rochester to come and see her. By March, Harriet says that she has not felt so well for a year as at present and so full of vim and energy with a comment that this was all without the doctor for she had not seen him. (3/11/75) At the same time, Leon writes, "I send you herewith the most elaborate, most original and most compelling story I have ever written, the FROZEN WORLD." (3/22/75)

By July, 1875, Harriet writes, "Mr. Lewis is busy upon a pile of manuscripts to apply upon our indebtedness to you, which we are very anxious to wipe out...I have begun a new story and send three numbers here. Mr. Lewis is anxious to settle the indebtedness himself, and it would be a great favor to us if you would...send me checks in payment of my story. Although we are living more plainly...and shall continue to do so while we continue to owe a single dollar, horses and house, and servants' wages with certain other items require money...We feel deeply, dear Mr. Bonner, all your generous kindness to us, and we beg you to believe that we are more worthy of it than the events of the last year or two would make us seem...and mistakes once seen are "never repeated!" (7/21/75)

Christmas greetings that year are closed with the comment, "You are more than ever clearly seen to be the ONE BEST FRIEND we have. You may be equally certain in turn that we are today more than ever conscious of the fact and more than ever grateful." (12/30/75)

Throughout the next year, there is the constant juggling of debt and payment, with Harriet being paid and Leon's payment going on the debt and interest. Still, there is cheerful enthusiasm evident when Leon writes to Bonner, "Mrs. L. and I have fully laid out these stories in careful collaboration (ROMAN ... and MISS WYND'S ENEMY) and have got them into that state of forwardness that it only remains for us to write for prompt completion. She is in charge of one and I am in charge of the other. We are glad to add that we have never written more effectively than we are now writing." (12/19/76)

By mid 1877, Harriet is still writing as she sends several numbers of a new adventure story entitled LORD OF STRATHMORE; OR, THE HIDDEN CRIME. "Although written by me, it is in Mr. Lewis' style and is equal or superior to GAYLE DASHER'S TREACHERY which as you may remember, I also wrote. The writing of stories of adventure are especially delightful to me after my English society stories, being a complete rest. Yet the society stories have for me a charm even greater in their turn." (7/21/77) She continues mentioning again that Mr. Lewis will attend to his story

and his latest indebtedness. She asks that Bonner take half of the amount owing her and apply it to the larger debt that they both have with Bonner. "We have trespassed a long time upon your forbearance and kindness and small as is this beginning towards paying the pecuniary portion of our debt, we make it hopefully confident that if your kindness but continues we shall pay every cent we owe and once more be free."

Leon, apparently, made some headway on his debts for in October he wrote to Bonner, "Well, I have [...] of the Sabins and all other nuisance and annoyances. All is now plain sailing and what is still better, I find that the old love of writing has come back to me stronger than 10 years ago and it is by this fact that I know I am writing better than ever before." (10/18/77)

The pressure of debts continued to disturb Harriet and finally in September of 1877, she takes it upon herself to write to Bonner without telling her husband that she is doing so. She says, "For some time I have desired to write to you freely and at some length about our indebtedness to you." She mentions that Leon is still being pressed to pay other debts and she is doing what she can with her pittance. "To stand free of debt is the greatest aim and object of my life. I shall never breathe freely until that object is gained." She goes on to reminisce about the house that her father had built for them, the care he took so that his children would live there years after he was dead. She finally reaches the point of her letter as she asks Bonner to rewrite their note for another five years as well as extending their contract for the same period. (9/12/77)

Within the week Bonner agrees and their letter to him is filled with thanks. In a much more humble tone than he normally used with Bonner, Leon says, "In all of which (referring to Harriet's comments) I most heartily agree. It is indeed impossible for me to say all that I feel on this occasion, but I am sure my acts and deeds in the future will speak for me." (9/18/77)

By next spring, Leon is able to write to Bonner to say, "Mrs. Lewis suggests that we have sent 81 installments at half rates and would Mr. Bonner be kind enough to sign the enclosed receipt." (4/19/78) The receipt indicates that the Lewises have paid \$6075 on account of their indebtedness. This is, apparently, the last work that Harriet does. During the early months of 1878 they learn that she has internal bleeding and will need surgery. By mid May Leon writes, "The care of Mrs. Lewis is developing features which fill us with grave concern, nevertheless, Dr. Moore is hopeful of mastering the adverse circumstances of the case and I cannot, will not doubt that I shall have better news to send to you tomorrow." (5/15/78)

Within days Harriet was dead, but not before she wrote a letter to Bonner to be sent to him in the event of her death. She writes, "If the operation is successful and if I am to live, then this letter will never reach your hands. I shall place it in the hands of my niece, sealed; its contents unknown to her or anyone with instructions to send it to be posted to you in case of my death... Mr. Lewis does not know that I am writing to you and I shall not tell him... You know all that I have been and all that I have tried to be to my husband. He is noble, honorable, warm-hearted and true as steel. He is impatient at times, and he has wild ideas that seem to him to promise wealth or fame. I have tried to be his balance wheel. What will he do when I am gone? Picture him lonely, without a child in the world, without a relative, with scarcely a friend but you. How can I leave him when he needs me so? Oh, Mr. Bonner you have been so kind to us both, be kind to him when I am gone. Will you not continue your friendship to him and be patient with him?... My death may

make him reckless, he may throw up all work, he may plunge into new schemes. I can not tell what he may do... I feel as if I must reach out from my very grave to implore your constant friendship for him who deserves it and who will be so desolate." (5/78)

Without necessarily doubting Bonner's sincerity that seems evident in these letters; he manages to overcome sentimentality in favor of good business, for her letter to him is published in the next issue of the *Ledger*.

Little is heard of Leon until September when he acknowledges a \$2000 check for his stories "The Exiled Prince," and "A Russian Hero." This was the last story of his that the *Ledger* published. The same day he sends an outline to Bonner enumerating his property in Penn Yan that is composed of the following:

1. Three houses in one block, cost us \$8000, well worth \$6000, insured for \$4400.
2. One house on two lots cost us \$4000 and worth that amount.
3. Four horses and turnouts, no value.
4. A valuable library of 10,000 books costing \$50,000, worth \$25,000.
5. Furniture, pictures, bronzes, etc. insured for \$12,000 and costing us, \$18,000.

He later adds, "Should have added to above, homestead house and lots and stable, etc. cost \$40,000 against which is a mortgage of \$15,000 with interest from October, 1874."

It would not be fair to leave you wondering about the devastated Leon. He began writing for *The Boy's World*, a London publication, and in 1880 he decided to move to London, along with his new wife, Julia, a niece of Harriet's whom they had adopted some years before. He died on October 28, 1920, 42 years after Harriet, at the age of 87, having lived the last years of his life with his sister, Mrs. S. Risley, of Bakerville, CT.

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NICK CARTER OUT WEST;

or,

The Great New York Detective in a New Setting

By J. Randolph Cox

Organized crime, long characteristic of frontier communities, now shifted to the cities, attracted by the concentration of wealth and the inadequacy of police protection. It may not be without significance that the last great frontier villainy, the James Boys' attempted robbery of the bank at Northfield, Minnesota, in 1876, was followed two years later by the first large-scale urban criminal exploit, the looting of New York's Manhattan Savings Institution of nearly \$3,000,000 by "Western George" Leslie and his gang.

THE RISE OF MODERN AMERICA, 1865-1951

By Arthur Meier Schlesinger

(New York: Macmillan, 1951), p. 48.

This statement parallels the history of the American Dime Novel which began with the publication of stories of the frontier, but eventually shifted to urban adventures, including detective stories. By the 1890s the frontier was only one of many settings for novels and stories in the Dime Novel era, not the primary one.

In 1883 the first dime novel series devoted to stories of detective work, the *Old Cap. Collier Library* began publication. It was followed very quickly by the *New York Detective Library*. By 1891, when the *Nick Carter Detective Library* began, the conventions belonging to the dime

novel detective story had been firmly established. Among these was the convention of the unlimited jurisdiction of the detective. No matter where the detective had his office, a client could call on his (or her) services in the remotest part of the globe and be certain that the detective would heed the call to duty.

My examination of the NICK CARTER texts dealing with his adventures Out West revealed several recurring conventions or themes. These include the sense that the West is different from the East and its citizens have different motives and different ways of expressing themselves. A handshake is as good as a signed contract, dexterity with lasso and revolver is taken for granted, a man's word is accepted on face value, gambling appears to be respectable while the professional gambler is not, the Westerner is not as cultivated or suave as the Easterner (his language shows that), but he is every bit as good, perhaps even superior in some intangible way; and he is kind and chivalrous where women are concerned, even when his heart is black. This contrast in cultures is often revealed when the Easterner visits the West (sometimes as a "tenderfoot," but sometimes not) or when the rough Westerner visits the more "civilized" East.

Let us take a quick trip Out West in the company of Nick Carter and see how often these conventions apply.

The selection of stories to consider here was done by surveying the titles and the cover illustrations. Some that looked promising—cover illustrations of men on horseback in the country—turned out to be set in New Jersey. Some of the stories have the characteristics of formula westerns in setting and situation. The conclusion may even include a gun battle. There are also many stories which *seem* like westerns, but aren't.

In spite of the Colorado setting, OLD THUNDERBOLT, LOCOMOTIVE; OR, THE PACKAGE IN THE MIDNIGHT MAIL (NCL-7) is not really a western. There is no physical description of the setting, no image of the West as a place. It is a story of a train robbery and the tracing of the stolen currency as well as the tracking of the villain by means of following the tracks of his horse.

There were so many stories involving railroads and train robberies in the *Nick Carter Library* that the publishers began including a checklist of them on the back cover of each issue under the heading, "Nick Carter's Great Railroad Stories." It must be understood that a train robbery does not make a story a Western.

The settings for the majority of the western NICK CARTER stories are Montana, Nevada, and Colorado. At least three are set in Texas: LOOTED IN TRANSIT; OR, NICK CARTER AMONG THE EXPRESS THIEVES (NCL-89) takes place in Galveston; THE TEXAS AND PACIFIC EXPRESS ROBBERY; OR, A NEW SET OF TRAIN BANDITS HELD UP BY NICK CARTER (NCL-176); and PATSY BEFORE THE ALAMO; OR, A SUDDEN CALL TO TEXAS (NCL-245).

The correct setting does not always make the story a Western. At one time we find Chick on an assignment by himself south of the border in YOUNG HERCULES IN MEXICO CITY; OR, PLUCK AND MUSCLE AGAINST STRATEGY (NCL-34). Sent by Nick to solve four murders, Chick does a good job, as expected. This story can best be described as a detective story set in a foreign city and not a western adventure. One might classify it as a story of foreign intrigue since two of the victims are officers in the Mexican Army.

Much the same can be said of the final episode of the trilogy about the outlaw band known as the Night Hawks in NICK CARTER IN ST. LOUIS; OR, THE NIGHT HAWKS' LAST SCREECH (NCL-36). Set in a city, even a western one, it is indistinguishable from any of the New York stories.

THREE TIMES DEAD; OR, NICK CARTER IN A TIGHT PLACE (NCL-39) takes

the reader to Sacramento, California, and a mining camp in Idaho. The text is liberally sprinkled with references to outlaws and the head villain is identified as Dr. Quartz's brother, who bears the improbable name of Waxem Willie. In spite of the attempt to make this an adventure in an exotic setting it could just as well have taken place in the East. The villains are not colorful outlaws, but tramps and burglars.

One might contrast the mining camp atmosphere with that in one of Bret Harte's tales of the California Gold Rush, but the economy of detail that contributes to the desired effect of the author of THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP seems lacking in the NICK CARTER story. Too much is hurried over and the loose ends tied up too quickly for a memorable performance.

Having disposed of many of the stories which have only the appearance of being Western adventures, let me now turn to the first of the true adventures of Nick Carter Out West, ONE AGAINST TWENTY-ONE; OR, THE RANCH ROBBERY (NCL-4). The "One" is, of course, Nick Carter. When Inspector Byrnes receives a letter asking for help he immediately summons his unofficial investigator, Nick Carter, who agrees to go to Hellion City, Nevada, a mining camp with a population of 100 (including one woman and one boy) to investigate the doings of a secret society called "The Twenty-One," that has the town in its grip.

There is more plot to this story than its sixteen pages can hold and still maintain logic and sense. There are only the sketchiest descriptions of the setting to let us know we are in the Western United States... rocks are rocks and hills are hills and one cabin is much like another. There is that same fine sense of geographic inexactitude that is found in Edward L. Wheeler's stories about Deadwood Dick. We do learn the meaning of *riata* as a footnote identifies it as a "Greaser term for lasso."

The significance of the story for the NICK CARTER series lies in the fact that here Nick meets his first assistant, Chickering Carter. It may be well to recount that initial encounter and the promise that is made by the characters to each other: "Nick departed soon after, and went at once to his cabin. On the ground in front of his door was crouched a boy. He was a shock-headed, ragged fellow, but his eyes shone with unusual brightness and his face was intelligent beyond his years, which could not have numbered more than seventeen." (p. 7)

His only name is "Chick," and he doesn't know his last name nor who his parents were. Nick hires Chick to help him on this case.

"Say! What d'ye want me to do?" [is the question]

"Take care of my horse, run errands, and fight for me if necessary," [answers Nick.]

"Wot do I git fur all that?" [asks Chick.]

"A home, plenty to eat, good clothes, and kind treatment. When I go away I will take you with me if you are a good boy. You shall have—"

"Hold on, pard; that's enough. Say! d'ye mean all that?"

"Every word."

"An all I've gotter do is to be faithful an' do's I'm told?"

"Precisely."

The boy stuck out his grimy hand as if impelled by a sudden impulse.

"Shake!" he said. "I'm wid ye in thick and thin!" (NCL-4, p. 8)

This contract (sealed by a handshake) lasted the lifetime of the series. On several occasions there is a reference to this early case in Nevada when Nick Carter and Chick met. Thus, the West becomes a significant metaphor in the stories. Nick seems drawn back there on a number of occasions, as though he is touching base by revisiting the scenes associated with the early days of his career.

YOUNG HERCULES, NICK CARTER'S ASSISTANT; OR, A MAN OF MUSCLE AND NERVE (NCL-25) does not feature Nick Carter as a character at all. Chick is the hero and anyone who has ever read a DEADWOOD DICK story by Edward L. Wheeler will recognize the situation in which Chick plays highwayman to hold up the robbers of the express car. The original robbery took place in the previous story in the series, NICK CARTER AT GLENDALE (NCL-24).

In this story there is the first use of an expression that suggests there is a real distinction between men of the East and men of the West, "There is nothing which will win the friendship and the respect of the western outlaw so quickly as reckless daring." (p. 6)

The setting is described in more precise terms than in the earlier stories. The canyon in which much of the action in the story takes place is described in some detail and then further identified in a footnote as one once used by the Younger gang as a hideout. This not only establishes the plausibility of the story, but introduces an element that is important to the sub-plot. The gang leader is said to be the daughter of outlaws Cole Younger and Belle Starr. As an element in the development of Chick's character, she also turns out to be his long lost, and hitherto unknown, sister, Cora.

The next story to fit the conventions of a formula western novel is THE PASSENGER GOING EAST; OR, AN OVERLAND MYSTERY (NCL-28). The setting is Nye County, Nevada, where a mysterious stage coach passenger (so bundled up that he or she is completely unidentifiable) disappears. Most of the story is told in dialogue and the reader doesn't even know which of the characters is Nick Carter until the final chapter, as he spends the entire story in disguise.

The author (Frederic Dey) seems to be slightly mocking the dime novel convention of disguise in this story. Chick (disguised) is found wounded and taken to safety. At first he is presumed to be dead. His body has been searched by Jim Munger, the saloon keeper, and the following conversation takes place between the town drunk, Sam Knapp (nicknamed Tank), and Munger:

"What did ye find?" [asks Tank]

"The cussedest lot o' things ye ever saw."

"What?"

"Fust, he had on three suits of clothes. He had a lot of pistols, a knife'r two, a couple of wigs, an'—"

"Wigs?"

"Yes."

"Hair?"

"Yes, an' beards an' a box o' paints, and the devil knows what all."

(p. 10)

The assumption is that Munger has found a thief, for only a thief would rely so heavily on disguise. Dey may have been having some fun with such an old device, realizing he could not always treat these conventions seriously.

In NICK CARTER IN KANSAS CITY; OR, THE NIGHT HAWKS REVIVED (NCL-32) highwaymen have been stopping horse-cars in the city and holding up the passengers. Nick and Chick both arrive to work on the case. Until near the end of the story they believe the party responsible is one Jetina Dill who, according to Nick, is "the smartest, quickest, and most daring female" he ever saw.

The conventions of the formula western can be seen in the opening scenes when a young lady is abducted by someone in a carriage which then speeds off down the street. Chick, dressed as a cowboy, mounts

his horse, rides after it, and tries to stop the carriage with his lasso. He might have succeeded if his horse had not been shot out from under him and sent him crashing to the pavement.

The crooked gambler is a stock character in the formula Western. The DAN DERRINGTON stories appeared in quick succession in the *Nick Carter Library*, THE GREAT BANK HOLD-UP IN DENVER; OR, NICK CARTER'S DIFFICULT CASE (NCL-61), SHOT WITH A ROULETTE BALL; OR, NICK CARTER AMONG THE GAMBLERS (NCL-62), THE SIX ACES; OR, EXPOSING A GREAT SWINDLE (NCL-63), the first time since the initial Dr. Quartz stories that an interconnected series of stories had appeared.

Dan Derrington, professional gambler with the air and appearance of a respectable business man, is Nick Carter's adversary in these stories, although his true character is ambiguous. The reader is never quite certain on which side of the law Derrington belongs. Perhaps the writer was equally uncertain.

The stories begin with the account of the daring daylight robbery of a Denver Bank President and end with Derrington on the side of Nick Carter (apparently). In the course of the twisted plots, the gambler's wife, Juanita, asks Nick for help in putting her husband behind bars. As she says, "I believed him to be the soul of honor, and found him to be a professional gambler and thief." (NCL-62, p. 5) When Nick's justice is not swift enough for her she shoots her husband dead, using a roulette ball as a bullet, with the horse pistol she carries.

Dead? Not anymore than any other figure in the dime novel world. Derrington shows up again on the train carrying Nick and Chick back to New York and they alter their plans in order to capture the Western gambler once and for all.

In THE DALTON GANG WIPED OUT; OR, NICK CARTER'S DEADLY RIFLE (NCL-67) the title represents the entire plot. Nick is hired by Kansas Marshall, Tom Connors, an old friend, to "exterminate the notorious Dalton gang." There is no detection here, just an adventure story that culminates in a shootout in Coffeyville, Kansas.

"An instant later Nick's deadly rifle spoke, and Bob Dalton, the notorious leader of the notorious gang, fell in his tracks, dead." (p. 15) It may be of interest, and even of some surprise, that according to the records in the Street & Smith Archives at Syracuse University, this story was written by Edward Stratemeyer.

Bob Dalton is one of those many-lived outlaws who ride through the pages of the *Nick Carter Library*. In NICK CARTER AFTER BOB DALTON; OR, TRACKING THE GREATEST OUTLAW SINCE JESSE JAMES (NCL-109) it is discovered just how many crimes seem laid at the doorstep of the Daltons and how a New York manhunter can function in the wilds of Kansas. At the end of the story Nick captures Bob Dalton who then escapes "before the day of trial, [to] continue...his life of crime." (p. 31) This statement is made in spite of the fact that we have already read in NCL-67, on page 15, that Nick shot the famous bandit dead.

Perhaps he was shamming. Perhaps Nick missed. (Hard to believe!) But the next two sentences from NCL-67 rule out that possibility. "There was not a quiver of his muscles after he fell. The bullet had struck him in the right temple, plowed through his brain, and passed out just above the left eye."

Somehow Nick must have been mistaken or the latest number of the *Nick Carter Library* described an episode that had occurred before the shootout in Coffeyville. The second story about Nick Carter and the Daltons was written by Alfred B. Tozer, who may not have had an opportunity to read the first.

Nick may have been mistaken in this instance, as he was so often when he thought he had seen the last of Dr. Quartz. Nick does not seem to have been able to predict his own future very well. Certainly, when he investigated the train robbery near Livingston, Montana, in *THE TRAIN ROBBERS' WIND-UP; OR, NICK CARTER'S SHORT WORK AT LIVINGSTON* (NCL-118), he thought that he had dealt with his last train robbers out west. Perhaps he was not thinking clearly. After all, it still rankled that someone had lassoed him because they mistook him for one of the robbers.

As we who follow Nick's adventures closely remember, Patsy (Nick's second assistant) went off on his own for awhile. Chick had tried it first, but he was soon back working in harness with his mentor, Nick Carter. Patsy appeared in 35 separate stories in the *Nick Carter Library* in which he played the sole or major role as detective. All of these were written by Frederick Russell Burton.

One of his cases, *PATSY BEFORE THE ALAMO; OR, A SUDDEN CALL TO TEXAS* (NCL-245), involves horse thieves. Patsy demonstrates how much he understands the conventions of the west when he asks if hanging isn't the usual penalty for this crime. He also wonders why he has been called into the case since he had always understood that "Texans were very quick to take the law into their own hands so far as the protection of their horses went, and [he] supposed that they never looked for outside aid in such a matter." (p. 2)

The ranch setting, the pursuit of a mysterious band of horse thieves with a leader named Laredo, who seems to have as many lives as a cat (he is pronounced dead at least twice), hard riding, and fast shooting, all of these conventions of the formula western are present in this story. The Texas setting seems more significant here and complements the plot in a way that has not been evident in earlier episodes of Nick Carter Out West.

Even after the turn of the century, the western states and territories played a significant part in the settings chosen for dime novels. The theme of the Easterner going West was often reversed by having someone from the West travel East to call on Nick Carter. Comic relief was supplied in abundance by the figure of the western gunman transplanted to the East.

In *NICK CARTER AND ARIZONA JAKE* (*Nick Carter Weekly*-256), Arizona Jake is described as "an unmanageable quantity. Though brave as a lion ...altogether too ready for a fight." (p. 7) He is quick to draw his revolver on the slightest provocation when things in New York seem too slow for him.

NICK CARTER AND THE NEBRASKA OUTLAWS; OR, PLAYING A DESPERATE GAME (NCW-369) is a straight formula Western in which there are more train robberies with Nick and Chick aiding the Pinkerton detectives. The gang is definitely described in Western terms, as outlaws, desperados, and as carrying "winchesters and revolvers and [wearing] black slouch hats."

THE MAN FROM NEVADA; OR, NICK CARTER'S COWBOY CLIENT (NCW-467) combines two interesting themes: the Westerner visiting the East and the references to Chick's boyhood in Nevada. Buck Bradshaw, who knew Chick as a boy, needs Nick's help to catch the man who murdered Madison Morgan and then, coolly, married Morgan's daughter.

THE MAN FROM MONTANA; OR, NICK CARTER AND THE CAVERN OF GOLD (NCW-501) is an exotic western in which Tom Short (over 6 feet tall) comes East to ask Nick to find the girl who had been left in his care by her dying father. The people who have kidnapped the girl belong to a tribe entrusted with the guarding of a vast treasure.

More typical, but with a variation on the East meets West theme, is *NICK CARTER AMONG THE "BAD MEN;" OR, THE MYSTERY OF INJUN PETE* (NCW-504).

"N. Carter, rancher," gets off the train at Lone Dog, Wyoming, to forestall a plot to kidnap financier J. Pierpont Morgan who is scheduled to pay a visit to the town while on a hunting trip. In the course of the story there is another, more sinister, plot revealed and the reader sees Nick Carter in action.

"Almost instantly a fusillade of shots sounded, and the bullets came humming through the broken window and the barroom door. Nick took up his original position facing the door, his guns in either hand. Then the doorway was blocked for a moment as two men sprang into the barroom, their guns above their heads ready for instant use. They scattered, seeking shelter. But Nick's Colts had been before them. Two shots rang out almost as one, and the men fell back through the door—one with the blood streaming down his shoulder, the other with a crippled leg." (p. 17) Like the Lone Ranger, Nick Carter shoots not to kill, but to wound or disarm.

The fictional world of the dime novel series was made up of rigid compartments. Few were the occasions for a character from one series to become involved with the characters from another. Old King Brady may have encountered Jesse James on occasion, but he did not pay a call on Young Sleuth to give him advice. Buffalo Bill did not ride over to Diamond Dick, Jr.'s home to lend him a hand. As far as we know, Frank Merriwell and Phil Rushington never met. However, Jack Wright and Frank Reade, Jr. did compete against each other in a race once and in 1907 Nick Carter and Ted Strong of *Rough Rider Weekly* worked together on a case.

It is in *THE PASSENGER ON THE NIGHT LOCAL; OR, NICK CARTER'S PERFECT DISGUISE* (NCW-525) that a train carrying both Nick Carter and Ted Strong stops to take on water some 30 miles from Whackup, Montana, in sagebrush country. Nick is the first to recognize his fellow passenger because he is used to sizing up strangers, while Ted has not had as much practice in the art.

"In your country [Nick says] you don't come in contact with strangers quite as much as I do in mine. And, again, I suppose you know the face of every man who lives within a hundred miles of your South Dakota ranch, do you not?" (p. 4) Ted reveals that he has recently acquired a second ranch in Montana and is there to visit his new holdings.

The same week that this issue of the *Nick Carter Weekly* was on sale, Nick was mentioned in the corresponding issue of *Rough Rider Weekly*; a few weeks later, the New York detective played a more substantial role in two stories over in that publication.

In 1907 and 1908, the writing in the *Nick Carter Weekly* seems more polished, the plots more plausible, and the visits to the territories more easily made than those earlier stories examined here. There are few telegrams received that merely say, "Come at once!" The plots often involve the establishing of one character's true identity, making a claim to a fortune (a mine, a ranch, etc.), besting an organized robber band (often just over the border from Mexico), and the settings seem to be more diverse. With the Klondike added to the American frontier at the turn of the century, the trail may even lead North as well as West.

There is enough detail in the descriptions to suggest the writers really knew what Montana looked like (or were doing more research) and there is less of the padding with terse dialogue to fill space when invention flagged. No doubt, the readers were more sophisticated as well.

By 1907 one would suppose that the name of Nick Carter was known to everyone, but such was not the case. In *A BAD MAN OF MONTANA; OR, NICK CARTER'S CHASE OF AN OUTLAW* (NCW-556), Bob Coburn had never even heard of Nick Carter. He and Jim Thornhill are discussing Major Corson's houseboat on the Missouri River and whether it might prove a tempting target for

robbers; all the while Nick is already on board keeping an eye on the Major's money.

It is in this story and its two sequels, *THE MAN FROM ARIZONA*; OR, *NICK CARTER SWIMS TO VICTORY* (NCW-557), and *KID CURRY'S LAST STAND*; OR, *NICK CARTER IN DANGEROUS SURROUNDINGS* (NCW-558), that we can see the greatest advance over the mere "shoot 'em up" of *THE DALTON GANG WIPED OUT* (1892), and a story in which there is an expression of a cohesive Code of the West.

The leader of the outlaws who are watching the Major's houseboat is Kid Curry, a member of Butch Cassidy's Wild Bunch. Contrast the hurried prose of the 1890s above with the more thoughtful, mature style of 1907.

"But the Kid was one who never lost much time in calculating the odds that were opposed to him in anything that he attempted to do. His methods were always characterized by recklessness and dash and fool-hardy bravery; always ready to shoot to kill himself, he figured that others were prepared to do the same; and he never went into an affair of this kind without taking these chances, and without thoroughly comprehending that he was as liable to be killed as anyone else." (NCW-556, p. 8)

Later in the story Nick assures the Corsons that the abduction of their daughter and niece by outlaws cannot have been the work of Kid Curry. The Kid would not have dared carry out the crime knowing just how swiftly justice would follow. "The chivalry of the West [says Nick], while rough and unpolished, crude and sometimes unrecognized, is the greatest and the noblest that has ever been known in the world, where a woman is concerned. There is no place in all the world where a young woman is so safe and so well guarded, and all the while so perfectly free and fearless, as she is within the borders of the great state of Montana." (NCW-556, p. 15)

The portrait of Kid Curry as presented by Frederic Dey in these stories is an ambiguous one. Curry is as bad as they come, but he can be trusted to do the right thing. He is the counterpart to the Noble Redskin, the Noble Outlaw.

Here is a description of the real Kid Curry: "Once a man had met him, he would never forget him. His moods, like his skin, were dark, his black eyes flat as a snake's, and when he spoke a man could feel the leashed violence in his body. He never shouted or got excited. He was quiet in a deadly fashion. Human life meant nothing to this man who would ride two hundred miles across the badlands to run down an innocent man. He was not a gunfighter in the flamboyant way. He did not tie down his guns, wear black sombreros or black shirts so men would think he was death on horseback and grow afraid. He was almost sloppy in his dress. Old Levis or chaps, a rough woolen shirt, a mackinaw, served him well. His single action .45 was always in his worn brown leather holster. He was fast on the draw, but the one great asset that lay with him in his stand-up fights was his utter contempt for fear and human life—even his own." (James D. Horan. *THE WILD BUNCH*, New York: Signet, 1958, p. 25)

Frederic Dey romanticized, even softened the portrait in his fictional version. There are references to real places (Landusky, Montana) and people (Jake Harris, alias Jew Jake) who figured in the original Kid Curry's career, but they are not drawn in detail, serving merely as "local color." But even in 1907 no one was likely to come forward to protest. Harvey Logan, the real Kid Curry, had shot himself to avoid capture in 1904. Butch Cassidy really was in South America at the time of these NICK CARTER stories and Dey grafted that part of history onto his fictional account.

It is the "tin-horn gambler" and crony of Kid Curry who really counts in this story. Known as "Arizona" after the state he had recently fled, he is planning to kill Nick Carter while Kid Curry is in jail.

"Arizona" is described as looking something like a deadly parson in his black coat.

"His costume was of black, and the coat was a frock. The waistcoat alone was unlike what a minister would have worn, for it was low-cut, like the vest of an evening suit, and a large diamond glittered in the very center of the wide expanse of shirt-front that showed. His collar was of the military shape, set off the more plainly by the presence of a black string tie. His hair was worn rather long, and it was brushed straight back from his death's head forehead. He was clean shaven, and his complexion was almost chalky in whiteness. The lines of his mouth were thin and cruel, and his eyes were small, and beady, and black, sometimes glittering like the eyes of a snake, and at other times chillingly cold and deadly in the suggested expression of them." (NCW-557, p. 8)

Melodramatic and over-drawn, but this is the portrait of a killer!

The second and third stories involve the escape and pursuit and recapture of Kid Curry...several times over. By the third story, both Kid Curry and "Arizona" have escaped and are suspected of organizing a new gang. Nick Carter disappears and the citizens' committee sends for Chick.

Perhaps the most interesting, and at the same time most frustrating, sub-plot is the one involving "Arizona's" past and that of Chick Carter. For it was "Arizona," under the name of "Black Nevada," who had made Chick's boyhood in Hellion City, Nevada, so miserable. In a long confrontation scene "Arizona" reveals that he knows who Chick's father was (something Chick has never been able to learn) and that he, "Arizona," is the man who killed him.

There is a significance to the fact that Chick has to fight "Arizona" alone. Chick's father died, leaving him on his own, before Nick Carter came to Hellion City and adopted him. For sixteen years, Nick has served as Chick's surrogate father, but Nick is not present and Chick has to tackle this problem, physically and psychologically, himself. In truth he becomes an adult. Nick's escape from imprisonment to complete the fight is merely an anticlimax.

The disappointment is that Dey made so little of this interesting situation other than to bring it up in passing over the years. The germ of the idea may have been in Dey's mind when he wrote ONE AGAINST TWENTY-ONE in 1891, and hurriedly set down the dialogue so he could finish that story and begin the next one. Sixteen years later he retrieved his idea once more and used it to add color to the new story.

At the end of KID CURRY'S LAST STAND, Chick asks Jim Thornhill what has happened to the outlaws. Thornhill tells him, "They have made their last stand, Chick—on nothing. That is usually the last stand of such as they were. Don't say a word. You know nothing about it; but try to remember that you have laws in the East and we have laws in the West. Some of ours may be unwritten, but they are effective. Let it go at that. Kid Curry has made his last stand—and so has the man who murdered your father. Forget it!" (NCW-558, p. 28)

And perhaps it is just as well. For all of Dey's powers of invention, there may have been no better way to end the story of the link with Chick Carter's past. In many ways, the NICK CARTER stories are like a cycle of legends in which there are many stories, but sometimes no real endings at all. As Pliny the Elder once said in his HISTORIA NATURALIS, "From the end spring new beginnings." Here, it would seem, the circle is complete.

The stories discussed here do not constitute all of the recorded accounts of Nick Carter's adventures Out West, but should serve as representative examples. The frontier, once the primary setting for the Amer-

ican dime novel, had become, by the early years of the 20th century, one of several colorful backgrounds against which the career of the great New York detective was portrayed. The way in which that background was presented represented the way in which the writers of the NICK CARTER stories saw the American West as an important part of the American culture.

* * * * *

HOW TO TREAT THOSE MUSTY AND BUGGY BOOKS

By Irene Gurman

If you secure some moldy or musty smelling books, and still value them, here's a simple treatment. Buy a bag of Kitty Litter, and put some in a covered container along with the smelly items. Change the litter as needed. No harm will come to any books or papers so treated.

Keep an eye on books with tiny pin-holes at the binding. It could become a sizeable bite in a short time. The book louse is at work. We can't always have temperature and humidity controls to guard our books, but if you have an old refrigerator, and keep the temperature at 70° or below, that bug'll remain dormant. Another treatment is to place the volumes in a carton, and hose exhaust fumes from your car into it. Unless the "save-a-lifers" come to the rescue, you will dispose of those little chompers in your good books. And, where do they come from? One source may be old wheat paste. Old houses that have wallpaper having been put up with wheat paste will develop the lice known to us as book worms.

Give these treatments a try!

* * * * *

A DIME NOVEL COLLECTOR'S BOOKSHELF

FAIRGROUND FICTION. Detective Stories of the World's Columbian Exposition, edited by Donald K. Hartman. Published by EPOCH BOOKS, 22 Byron Street, Kenmore, NY 14223. Included is a reprint of Beadles Dime Library #776, CHICAGO CHARLIE, THE COLUMBIAN DETECTIVE, by Lt. A. K. Sims (John H. Whittson). An appendix lists stories published about the Columbian Exposition, though a few dime novels have been overlooked. The book is well illustrated with scenes from the Exposition. 458 pages, bound in laminated cover stock. \$15.95 plus \$2.75 for postage. This book should be in every dime novel collector's collection.

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AN ITEM OF INTEREST TO ALGER COLLECTORS

HORATIO ALGER: THE ART OF PEDERASTY, by Robert Forrey. Article in *Bootblack: The Horatio Alger Magazine*, November-December, 1991. Despite the sensational title this is a serious and scholarly article examining relationships existing between adolescent males in the Alger stories, and comparing them with the teacher and benefactor (erastes) with the student and protege (eromenos) in classical Greek civilization. "In understanding Alger and his work, the Greek context is as important as the American; the psychological as important as the historical."

LETTERS AND NOTES

You have had some fine articles this year. Have been most enjoyable.

I don't buy any more books as I sold about all of my collection before we moved to Oregon 3½ years ago, but I do like to keep up with the news and articles.

Paul S. Latimer
1200 Mira Mar, #526
Medford, OR 97504

* * *

Rocco Musemeche reports that Mr. Edria Willard "Eddie" Bennett died November 23, 1991. "The demise of one of us, a true blue collector whose fair dealigs and kind consideration of his customers across the land and overseas was well known."

* * *

Irene Gurman informs us that ELVIS, by Jerry Hopkins, calls Elvis Presley the HORATIO ALGER OF THE SOUTH!

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6:30-8:30 PM	Reception and Tour	Browning Library
FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 1992		
7:30-9:00A	Directors' Breakfast Registration	Bill Daniel Student Ctr La Quinta Inn
9:30-11:30A	Panel Discussion - <i>THE STATE OF JUVENILE BOOK COLLECTING</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gil Ogara -- (General Boys' Series) • Bill Gowen -- (Stratemeyer & Syndicate) • Brad Chase -- (Alger) • Bart Nyberg -- (General Boys' Series) • Kathleen Chamberlain -- (General Girls' Series) • Edward LeBlanc -- (Dime Novels) 	Browning Library
11:30A-12:30P	Lunch	Bill Daniel Student Ctr
1:00-6:00P	Four Auctions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walter Moore's Collection (PF-131) • Two other collections (announced later) • The annual fund raiser auction 	Browning Library
7:00-10:00P	Dinner followed by the annual business meeting.	Harrington Faculty Ctr
SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 1992		
8:00A-12:00P	Book Sale and Silent Auction (Note: The book room will be open on Thursday for book setup and sales. The room will be secured during the entire convention.)	Browning Library
12:00-7:00P	Open Time	Good Collecting in Dallas & Austin
7:00-10:00P	Banquet, Elections, Announcements	The Brazos Queen



**the HORATIO ALGER SOCIETY
1992 CONVENTION**

Registration Form



PANEL DISCUSSION ○ GIANT BOOK SALE ○ 4 BOOK AUCTIONS

BOOK STORES ○ FRIENDSHIP ○ SIGHTS

and

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Register !!!NOW!!! for the 1992 Horatio Alger Society Convention. Just fill in the information below and return it to : *Bob Collmer, 2801 Wooded Acres, Waco, Texas 76710 (817) 772-1897*

Registration fee this year is \$50.00 per person and includes refreshments on Thursday evening, lunch and dinner on Friday, and the banquet on Saturday.

A special rate of \$47.00 plus tax has been arranged with the La Quinta Inn in Waco. Contact them directly for reservations: *The La Quinta Inn, 1110 South 9th Street, Waco, Texas 76706 (817) 752-9741*

Only limited air service is available into Waco. We suggest that you fly into Dallas (DFW) and rent a car for the 90 minute drive to Waco.

YES. Sign me (us) up for the 1992 Horatio Alger Society Convention (Please print or type):

Name: _____ PF#: _____
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the **HORATIO ALGER SOCIETY**
1992 CONVENTION



- Panel Discussion: *THE STATE OF JUVENILE BOOK COLLECTING*
- Giant Book Sale: Bring treasures to sell. Buy treasures to take home
 - Book Auctions: Boys' Series, Girls' Series, Algers, Stratemeyers
 - Book Stores: Dallas and Austin (each 90 Minutes by freeway)
 - Friendship: Meet some of the nicest book collectors in the USA
 - Browning: The largest Browning Collection in the United States
- Sights: The Brooklyn Bridge's Older Brother, The Dr. Pepper Museum

When: April 23, 24, 25, 1992 **Where:** Waco, Texas

The Horatio Alger Society is dedicated to the principles of honesty, hard work, and fair play found in the writings of Horatio Alger, Jr. Membership is open to anyone who shares these ideals and who has an interest in collecting juvenile series books. You do not need to be a member to attend the convention!!!

For Registration Information Contact:

Bob Collmer, 2801 Wooded Acres, Waco, Tx 76710 (817) 772-1897

For Alger Society Membership Information Contact:

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The Boys Who Got Another Chance 1911 |
| 14. Frank Merriwell's Champions . . . 1904 | |
| 15. Frank Merriwell's Return to Yale . 1904 | |

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